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ABSTRACT

Some of the author's findings as a bilingual educator are summarized in this paper. One of the principal problems encountered in bilingual education is the inadequacy of classroom materials and texts. It was found, however, that though most teachers express dissatisfaction regarding materials, few of them see the potential impact of contacting authorities on curriculum evaluation to either support or criticize specific texts. This could be changed were they aware of channels of authority for expressing such opinions. Further, it was observed that bilingual educators in one region of the country have too little sense of what is going on in their field in other parts of the country. In a class for bilingual teachers, various means were introduced by the author in order to help these teachers perceive the universe of bilingual education and maximize their effectiveness in the classroom. The provision of information on resources, and the utilization of a pre-assessment questionnaire in their classes were among the means suggested. (Author/GC)

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TOWARDS GREATER COMMUNICATION
IN BILINGUAL PROGRAMS

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Bilingual Programs have many strengths. Certainly, if it were not for bilingual programs, children who are now given a chance to succeed, would have once remained neglected, unattended, ignored. Unfortunately, the public as well as media insists on focusing on negative rather than on positive aspects of bilingual education.

While it is important for bilingual educators to feel genuine pride in their roles, it is equally important to maintain a critical spirit.

One serious problem facing bilingual education is the need for greater communication within and among bilingual programs. It has been my experience as a professor of bilingual education that the teacher fails to see where he fits in the chain leading from the teacher up to the federal levels. At the same time, higher levels of authority are viewed as amorphous masses and not concretely in terms of "flesh and blood." As examples students hear about HEW, the State Department, Curriculum Development Center, although these entities tend to remain remote. It is not that the local, district, state or federal levels are unwilling or reluctant to be of assistance to the bilingual teacher in the public school system but rather that the

teacher is uninformed as to the resources, information or options available. The need for communication is greatest at the level of the teacher in the classroom. The purpose of the present article is to summarize some of my findings as a bilingual educator in an attempt to aid other colleagues in bringing to light some devices for imparting in bilingual teachers a clearer knowledge and perspective in terms of available resources.

The general malaise is one of the teacher expressing himself as a powerless agent of change. Perhaps one could generalize to say that this is also true outside of bilingual programs, but as we know, bilingual educators are constantly on the spotlight and so they must exert that much more energy in their profession. In any case, I have found that bilingual teachers in my classes tend to "settle" for the texts they are using, individually attempting to improve their curricula as the unaided mythological figure of Sisyphus. They do not see the transcendence of what they are doing beyond the classroom. The tendency is to see themselves as an undefined mass apart from the mainstream. Further, they do not aspire towards change in the status quo for the change is seen as taking place externally. As one example, in a class on communication skills, I asked my students for an evaluation of their own classroom (K-12) materials/texts and found that in many cases the impressions were negative. After discussing the

criteria for evaluating materials, I asked how many students had contacted an authority regarding their views; the response was negative. I then spent some time discussing the Northeast Center for Curriculum Development and the purpose: the creation and development of superior texts. I then spoke of the impact of a letter either supporting or critiquing curricular materials, but my teachers could not see the tangibility or value of "one letter from a school teacher in school X, in district X." I then tried to impress the value of teacher feedback but found the resistance tremendous. After supplying the names of the experts to be contacted: Aurea Rodriguez and Mr. Aponte, the thought of such an act seemed feasible. As an optional requirement to the course, I suggested that students attend a workshop at the Center, which several did, and the experience became concrete.

As an Assistant Professor in the Kean College bilingual program, I found that teachers from Perth Amboy did not know what was happening in Elizabeth; nor Jersey City or in Dover or Plainfield or Newark. Having had representative teachers from all of the above districts, I remedied this by videotaping classes from each of the areas and then had teachers describe their own bilingual programs, thereby arriving at a certain commonality. Through trial and error,* I decided to develop a questionnaire which I invite my colleagues to utilize at the college or university level.

The purpose of the pre-assessment questionnaire helps me determine prior experience and expertise thereby providing me with a frame of reference.

The questionnaire (copy attached) which I propose in no way purports to reflect how little the bilingual educator knows. On the contrary, it serves:

- (a) to reflect past and varying experiences of students in my classes.
- (b) as a mode of highlighting important areas of concern
- (c) as a mode for sparking interest in exploring and pinpointing resources
- (d) to prevent duplication of presentations.

Another enrichment device I use is that of presenting flow charts on the district, state and federal levels. In the past HEW has printed organizational charts accompanied by key figures holding these positions, which give the student the opportunity of seeing the interrelation and complexity of the educational system while at the same time allows him to conceptualize that vastness making the organization more tangible and operative.

When describing HEW I also employ videotapes: while a professor at Kean, HEW presented a workshop in Newark at the request of the Congreso Boricua; I found that when my students viewed the presentations by key figures of HEW, the agency took on a totally different meaning. The result was one of empowering teachers into engaging students in a more active dialogue and positive mobility.

On other occasions, on attempting to understand the attitudes of parents and other members of the community, I assigned a project where bilingual teachers of Newark went into the community and proceeded to interview members of their district. The videotape served as a focus for discussion on community participation in bilingual education. The experience was enriching to everyone and provided a much broader perspective than simply reading a text or straight lectures.

On a third occasion, in helping students perceive the universe of bilingual education, I assigned another group to contact someone on the local, district state levels. Again the experience was not only rewarding to members of the project, but to all members of the class who could then share in the experience.

As a result, students of Elizabeth soon realized that Roberta Kanarick, then a representative of the bilingual unit at the State Department in Trenton, was "flesh and blood" and not just an external agent who came in to their school to monitor the bilingual program. Perhaps one might dispute the contents of the questionnaire. It is simply a mode of assessing what is already known by the bilingual teacher. Just as in elementary and secondary schools where our children come into the classroom with widely differing backgrounds, so too, as professors of bilingual education we have students/teachers/paraprofessionals, resource people with an array of background and expertise. I feel

that the questionnaire could help the professor in best utilizing valuable time as well as incorporating the experiences of her students in university programs.

Still another form of pre-assessment might very well be the distribution of competencies to be achieved by the end of the semester. I speak from my own background. Whenever I have had to meet a goal, it was always important to know what the means of attaining that goal was and the steps necessary to attaining that goal.

In conducting a pre-assessment, one can begin to focus on what it is that bilingual programs are, and the in the process their relationship to other agents. It is my contention, that as bilingual teachers begin to focus on the breadth of bilingual programs and the outreach, that they will take on a different meaning for the individual teachers.

Minimally, a questionnaire would oblige the student to focus on important issues and basic structures and agents in bilingual education. The effect would also be one of familiarizing the teacher with a clearer scope of bilingual education, presenting a clearer picture of the hierarchy of bilingual education, providing a closer touch (whether through videotapes or direct encounter) with other agents of bilingual education, and finally viewing the bilingual teacher as a positive agent of change (whether in the form of critiquing materials, or creating materials

for the classroom). After all, our present bilingual students are the future originators of texts, legislators, formulators of research, policy makers and administrators.

Perhaps I am making a projection, but I am of the feeling that teachers, above all, bilingual teachers, need and want structure.

Finally, I would like to add that the substance and format of eliciting the information included in my questionnaire might very well be changed to incorporate the interview technique, in which four or five students group together in compiling the information; or perhaps the critical technique, in which the most positive and most negative experiences, including insights are recorded and shared with all members.

Bilingual teachers, nationally, are constantly in search of sparking their own students into further exploration and discovery. I see this method as doing the same for our bilingual teachers, who teach their bilingual students, the leaders of tomorrow.

PRE-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of the pre-assessment questionnaire is to determine the prior knowledge and exposure you have had as bilingual teachers, and to assist the professor in maximizing time in presenting coursework.

Name _____

Years of Experience _____

How long have you been teaching in a bilingual class? _____

Grade/Level _____

Type of NYC License _____

Highest College earned degree _____

Identify the following key people:

Bilingual Director at your district _____
Coordinator in your district _____
Director at the State level _____
Three key figures at the federal level _____

Identify the following and list one major function or the following agencies:

IHE _____

LEA _____

SEA _____

HEW _____

RFP _____

Federal Register _____

LAU Centers _____

Have you ever requested assistance at the local, state, federal levels?
Specify.

How many languages are addressed by bilingual programs nationally?

Number of Programs

Have you had experience in writing proposals?
Specify.

Identify and give the functions of the following:

Title I

Title II

Title III

Title VI

Title VII

Title IX

What is ERIC and how have you consulted it in conjunction with your studies in bilingual education?

Have you perused the materials in your district's resource center?
If so specify.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Division Consulted</u>
_____	audio-video equipment	_____
_____	retrieval services	_____
_____	vertical files	_____
_____	workshops	_____
_____	research	_____
_____	curricular guides	_____
_____	film strips	_____
_____	facilitators	_____

Have you visited the Northeast Center for Curriculum Development (NCCD). If so, specify the nature of your visit and findings.

Have you ever submitted feedback to publishers, curriculum development centers or other research centers regarding the content of the texts, materials, which you employ in the classroom? Specify.

Have you been videotaped in your classroom?

*Identify the following typologies of bilingual education:

Mackey

Valencia

Fishman

Identify four models of bilingual education:

State four priorities in bilingual education:

Define: Maintenance Program of Bilingual Education

Transitional Program of Bilingual Education